

"This animal is found only where the country has rather a desert character. It is a common feature in the landscape of Patagonia, to see in the distance two or three of these Cavies hopping one after another in a straight line over the gravelly plains, thinly clothed by a few thorny bushes and a withered herbage. Near the coast of the Atlantic, the northern limit of this species is formed by the Sierra Tapalguen, in latitude $37^{\circ} 30'$, where the plains rather suddenly become greener and more humid. The limit certainly depends on this change, since near Mendoza, ($33^{\circ} 30'$) four degrees further northward, where the country is very sterile, this animal again occurs. Azara erroneously supposed that its northern range was only 35° .^{*} It is not clear on what circumstances its limit southward between Ports Desire and St. Julian (about $48^{\circ} 30'$) depends; for there is in that part no change in the features of the country. It is, moreover, a singular circumstance, that although the Cavy was not seen at Port St. Julian during our voyage, yet Capt. Wood, in 1670, speaks of them as being numerous there. What cause can have altered, in a wide, uninhabited, and rarely visited country, the range of an animal like this?

"Azara states,[†] that the Cavy never excavates its own burrow, but uses that of the Bizcacha. Wherever this animal is present, without doubt this is true; but on the sandy plains of Bahia Blanca, where the Bizcacha is not found, the Spaniards maintain that the Cavy is its own workman. The same thing occurs with the little owls of the Pampas (*Noctua cunicularia*), which have been described by travellers as standing like sentinels at the mouths of almost every burrow; for in Banda Oriental, owing to the absence of the Bizcacha, these birds are obliged to hollow out their own habitations. Azara says, also, that this Cavy, except when pressed by danger, does not enter its burrow; on this point I must again differ from that high authority. At Bahia Blanca I have repeatedly seen two or three of these animals sitting on their haunches by the mouths of their holes, which they quietly entered as I passed by at a distance. Daily, in the neighbourhood of these spots, the Cavies were abundant: but differently from most burrowing animals, they wander, commonly two or three together, to miles or leagues from their home; nor do I know whether they return at night. The Cavy feeds and roams about by day; is shy and watchful; seldom squats after the manner of a hare; cannot run very fast, and, therefore, is frequently caught by a couple of dogs, even of mixed breed. Its manner of running more resembles that of a rabbit than of a hare. The Cavy generally produces two young ones at a birth, which are brought forth within the burrow. The flesh, when cooked, is

^{*} Azara, Voyage dans l'Amérique Méridionale, vol. i. p. 318.

[†] Azara, Quadrupeds of Paraguay.

very white; it is, however, rather tasteless and dry. Full grown animals weigh between twenty and twenty-six pounds.—D.

HYDROCHÆRUS CAPYBARA.

Hydrochoerus Capybara, Auct.

"These animals are common wherever there are large rivers or lakes, over that part of the South American Continent which lies between the Orinoco and the Plata, a distance of nearly 1400 miles. They are not generally supposed to extend south of the Plata; but as there is a Laguna Carpincho (the latter being the provincial name of the Capybara) high up the Salado, I presume they have sometimes been seen there. Azara does not believe they ever frequent salt water; but I shot one in the Bay of Monte Video; and several were seen by the officers of the Beagle on the Island of Guritti, off Maldonado, where the water is very nearly as salt as in the sea. The one I shot, at Monte Video, was an old female; it measured from tip of snout to end of stump-like tail, 3 feet $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches, and in girth 3 feet 2 inches. She weighed 98 pounds. I opened the stomachs of a couple, which I killed near a lake at Maldonado, and found them distended with a thin yellowish-green fluid, in which not more than a trace of a vegetable fibre could be distinguished: it is in accordance with this fact, that a part of the œsophagus is so narrow, as I am informed by Mr. Owen, that scarcely anything larger than a crow-quill can be passed down it. The shape of the dung of these animals is a short straight cylinder, rounded at the extremities; when dried and burnt, it affords a pleasant smell like that from cedar wood. These animals do not burrow holes, but live amongst the thickets, or beds of rushes near rivers and lakes. At Maldonado they often may be seen during the day, seated on the grassy plain in small groups of three and four, at the distance of a few yards from the border of the lake, which they frequent. I must refer the reader for a few more details respecting their habits, to my Journal of Researches.—D."